

## The Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington

*"developing the learner in every child"*

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March 16, 2015

Dear Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Education Committee,

I am the Director of the Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington. Together with the chairperson of our Collaborative, I am writing to you today to ask you to support **H.B. No. 7020 and to restore the funding for the local Early Childhood Collaboratives in the State of CT.** The work that our Collaborative does in Southington is critical, as we are the advocates for our youngest community members and the central early childhood resource in the community for their families. Our work supports the physical and mental health, academic achievement and social and emotional behavior of these young children on a local level. It has been well documented that quality early experiences matter and in our role as advocates, we can share this message with the parents and caregivers in our community and support them as a child's first and most important teacher. Our value is such that without our advocacy work and support of these families, the ones most in need will lose their support structure and no longer have a localized central early childhood resource and champion. If this funding is eliminated, sadly, our Collaborative will be forced to consider significantly reducing or ceasing our operations.

In April 2014, in part with some of the funds that the state had appropriated to us, we created *The Community Plan for Southington's Young Children*. This comprehensive Plan showcases what Southington is doing right and what needs to be improved with regard to the support and development of young children in our community. One area that we identified as needing improvement was in the area of early math skills. Recent research shows that early math skills are just as, if not more, important a determinant of academic success as reading skills. After identifying through comprehensive data analysis in the Plan that Southington's kindergarten students were struggling in the area of math, the ECCS worked closely with the Southington Public Schools district math specialists to create math manipulative kits for this year's incoming kindergarten students. These kits are designed to be used at home by parents and caregivers to allow young children the critical introduction to mathematics to benefit them upon enrollment in the public schools. Without our diligent work to identify these gaps, a solution that allows us to begin to make strides toward "turning the curve" and improving early math skills might not have been possible.

We are able to financially sustain our work thanks to generous private grant dollars from foundations that believe in the importance of quality early childhood experiences. The contribution from the state is a small amount of our overall dollars -

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yet that funding could not be more critical because with our work, every dollar counts and goes toward advocating for these quality early experiences at the local level. Our entire budget for our Collaborative is \$92,109 – of this, only \$19,791, or 21.5%, comes from the state – meaning that our operations are supported by private foundation and local match dollars in the amount of \$72,318, or 78.5%. The members of our Collaborative constantly look for funding opportunities in other areas to support our work. But even with that private support, the state dollars do make a huge difference and are matched dollar for dollar by one of the foundations that supports our work. I implore you to **reinstate this funding to allow our local early childhood collaborative work to continue**. It's making a difference with our families in Southington and reaching those most in need of this type of advisement and support. It is also worth noting that for every dollar invested in the work that we are doing, there is a \$16 return on that investment when these young children graduate high school. In addition, support for the academic, social and emotional development of these young children lessens the need for remedial coursework in the future.

You can learn more about our Community Plan by visiting our website at [www.southingtonearlychildhood.org](http://www.southingtonearlychildhood.org). If you have any specific questions, you may contact us at [southingtonearlychildhood@gmail.com](mailto:southingtonearlychildhood@gmail.com) or 860-478-1362. We sincerely hope that you will support H.B. No. 7020 and allow these critically necessary dollars to be reinstated in the budget for CT. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Mary E. Yuskis, Ed.D.  
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Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington  
Southington Resident

Michelle Slimak, M.S.  
Chairperson  
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